

CRAWDADDY

**BOB MARLEY
AND THE REGGAE
REBELLION**

**PATTY HEARST'S
ORDEAL
BY WM. KUNSTLER**

SPECIAL 14-PAGE
FILM FESTIVAL:

**DIANE KEATON
ON THE LOOSE**

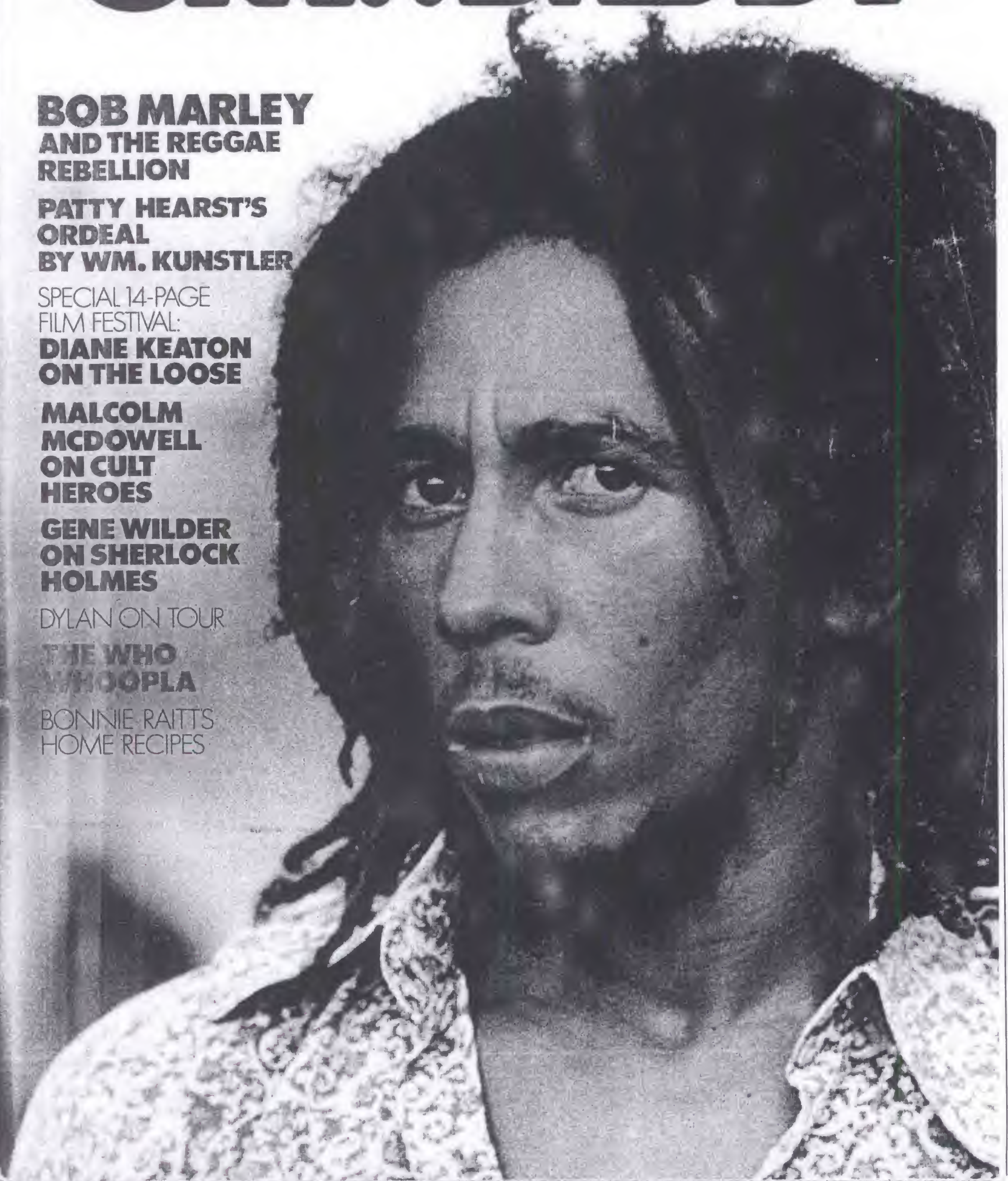
**MALCOLM
MCDOWELL
ON CULT
HEROES**

**GENE WILDER
ON SHERLOCK
HOLMES**

DYLAN ON TOUR

**THE WHO
WHOOPLA**

BONNIE RAITT'S
HOME RECIPES



Time of the Assassins

William Burroughs

Some years ago in London, I was having dinner with Jasper Johns in the Connaught Hotel. I asked him what painting was all about—what are painters really doing? He countered with another question: what is writing about? I did not have an answer then; I have an answer now: The purpose of writing is to make it happen.

What we call "art"—painting, sculpture, writing, dance, music—is magical in origin. That is, it was originally employed for ceremonial purposes to produce very definite effects. In the world of magic nothing happens unless someone wants it to happen, *wills* it to happen, and there are certain magical formulae to channel and direct the will. The artist is trying to make something happen in the mind of the viewer or reader. In the days of cows-in-the-grass painting, the answer to "What is the purpose of such painting?" was very simple: to make what is depicted happen in the mind of the viewer; to make him smell the cows and the grass, hear the whistling rustle. The influence of art is no less potent for being indirect. We can leave riots, fires, and wrecks to the journalists. The influence of art has a long-range cultural effect. Jack Kerouac, Allen Ginsberg, Gregory Corso—the Beats wrote a world-wide cultural revolution. Remember that four-letter words could not appear on a printed page 29 years ago. Now, with the breakdown of censorship and the freeing of the Word, *The New York Times* has to print four-letter words used by the President of the United States.

We can trace the tremendous indirect effect of the written word; what about the indirect effect of painting? In 1959 Brion Gysin said that writing is fifty years behind painting and applied the montage technique to writing—a technique which had been used in painting for fifty years. As you know, painters had the whole representational position knocked out from under them by photography, and there was in fact a photography exhibition around the turn of the century entitled "Photography—the Death of Painting." Premature, but painting did have to get a new look. So painters turned first to montage.

Now the montage is actually much



MALCOLM MCNEILL

closer to the facts of perception, certainly urban perception, than representational painting. Take a walk down a city street and put what you have just seen down on canvas. You have seen half a person cut in two by a car, bits and pieces of street signs and advertisements, reflections from shop windows—a montage of fragments. And the same thing happens with words. Remember that the written word

Dead cows in the grass and other unfavorable mutations

is an image. Brion Gysin's cut-up method consists in cutting up pages of text and re-arranging them in montage combinations. Representational painting is dead, unless perhaps the new photo-realism takes hold. Nobody paints cows in the grass any more. Montage is an old device in painting. But if you apply the montage method to writing, you are accused by the critics of promulgating a cult of unintelligibility. Writing is still confined in the sequential representational straitjacket of the novel, a form as arbitrary as the sonnet and as far removed from the actual facts of human perception and consciousness as that fifteenth-century poetical form. Consciousness is a cut-up; life is a cut-up. Every time you walk down the street or look out the window, your stream of consciousness is cut by random factors.

Painting in the past hundred years has come from an exclusively representational position, where any number of artists could cover the same

material, to such a state of fragmentation that every artist must now have his own special point on which there is only room for one artist. Any number of artists can paint country landscapes, but there is only room for one Warhol soup can. It's every artist his own movement now. Now here is a question for all schools: If art has undergone such drastic alteration in the past hundred years, what do you think artists will be doing fifty or a hundred years from now? Of course we can foresee expansion into the realm of exploding art. . . . A self-destroying TV set, refrigerator, washing machine, and electric stove going off, leaving a shambles of a gleaming modern apartment; the housewife's dream goes up behind a barrier of shatterproof glass to shield the spectators.

Now here's another angle for you young art hustlers: there is an explosive known as ammonium iodide made by pouring ammonia over iodide crystals or mixing it with tincture for brush work. This compound when it dries is so sensitive that a fly will explode it. I remember how I used to wile away the long 1920's afternoons with sugar sprinkled around little heaps of ammonium iodide waiting for the flies to explode in little puffs of purple vapor. So you paint your canvas with ammonium iodide and syrup and release a swarm of flies in the gallery . . . or the people walking around set it off with their vibrations . . . or a team of choir boys touches it off with pop guns. . . .

And metal sodium explodes violently on contact with water; so you paint in sodium (which has a beautiful sheen like the side of a silver fish in clear water), stand well back, and shoot it

Crawdaddy

with a water rifle, or induce a spitting cobra to spit on it and get blown apart. Can sacrificial art be far behind? Cut a chicken's head off and paint with the gushing blood. Disembowel a sheep and paint with its intestines. Or you can do a combo with the sodium number.

Then there will be the famous Mad Bear Floyd, a billionaire painter who covered a twenty-foot montage of porno pictures with thousand-dollar bills soaked in ammonium iodide . . . the montage was laid in the middle of the gallery, then a hamper of thousand-dollar bills rained down and set off the charge, burning a million dollars out of circulation while his agent sold the burnt canvas for \$10 million on the spot.

Could this proliferation of competitive angles precipitate a revival of old-time potlatches? The potlatch was a competitive destruction of property carried out until one contestant was ruined and frequently died of shame on the spot. It is interesting to consider American tycoons fitting into this game—blowing up their factories and mines and oil wells, burning their crops and sloshing oil on their beaches, irradiating their land, irrigating with salt water, letting the frozen food rot, burning Rolls Royces and Bentleys, first editions and Rembrandts, destroying Greek statues with air hammers . . . the American team drops atom bombs on America while China and Russia match us bomb for bomb on their own ground. The potlatch was perhaps invented by the Northwest Coast Indians in the area that is now British Columbia, and it occupied most of their time. Objects destroyed at these uncomfortable occasions included salmon oil, blankets, and

coppers. Salmon oil poured on an open fire at the center of the room frequently singed honored guests in the front row who were obliged by protocol to evince no signs of displeasure. The coppers were engraved shields of thin copper about three feet by two feet, and are now highly valued as curios.

A copper receives its value from the number of potlatches it has weathered: "THIS IS THE GREAT COPPER BEFORE WHICH OTHER COPPERS PISS THEMSELVES LIKE BITCH DOGS."

And cowardly coppers shrink back, losing value. You see, a potent copper like this represents so many value units, just as modern art objects may derive value from a series of competitive manipulations: this soup can represents fifty burnt kitchen chairs, twenty urinals, and a Wyeth pig. Competitive over-inflation of values could lead to *La Chute de l'Art*; a total collapse of the art market. Imagine the artist bourse where all the painters stand by their pictures—frenzied phone calls from broker to collector . . .

"Your margin's wiped out, B.J. You gotta cover with the gilt-edge stuff—you know what I mean: Monets, Renoirs, Rembrandts, Picassos. . . ." And then: **PICASSO SLUMPS SHARPLY AS HIS ENTIRE OUTPUT IS DUMPED ON THE MARKET BY FRANTIC DEALERS.** . . . As an artist falls off the Board he is obligated by the Board of Health to surrender his pictures to the public incinerator. What art and what artists would survive the holocaust? And how's this for an angle, B.J.? Now this ART grabs you by the balls, see? It hits you in the stomach and dampens your eyes. So the artist gets behind his picture like Punch and

Judy and reaches right out through it and grabs a critic by his lapels or slugs him in the guts and sprays him with tear gas. Lots of ways you can slant this. Dead cows in the grass. Dogs leap out of a picture. Vernissage savagely clubbed by picture cops. It finally gets so that pictures of dangerous animals, electric chairs, riots, fires, and explosions have the gallery to themselves. Will cows in the grass make a comeback? A critic was gored yesterday. Another drowned in a Monet river and a Bacon exhibition has given rise to unfavorable mutations. . . .

What has happened here? Art has become literal and returned to its magical function of making it happen, after a long exile in the realms of Imagination where its appetite for happenings has become inordinate. Now suddenly art makes its lethal eruption into the so-called real world. Writing and painting were one in the beginning and the word was written image. Now painters paint a future before it is written, having outstripped the retarded twin, writing, and left it back there with the ABC's. Will writing catch up?

A writer who writes a book about a virgin soil epidemic, impregnating his pages with the virus described . . . this book about Poland in a typhus epidemic has typhus lice concealed in the bindings, to be released as book-of-the-month-club ladies turn the pages. Mektoub. It is written. Others have radioactive pages dusted lightly with botulism. The reader is no longer safely reading about sharks while she belches out chocolate fumes; on the pages is a powerful shark attractant. Others scorn such crude tricks and rely on the powers of magic—potent spells and curses, often firm by human sacrifice, flutter from these pestilent pages.

"Beauty kills. Beauty is the murderer," in the words of Gregory Corso, and painting is reunited with its stupid brother, writing, in books done entirely in pictographs. And by now all books are scented with the appropriate odors and readers are provided with scent bottles for renewal . . . Musky Ozone, Rain On Horseflesh, Empty Locker Rooms. . . . Finally comes the Master of the Empty Page, which can be read directly by Initiates. . . .

LA CHUTE DU MOT . . . what survives the literalization of art is the timeless ever-changing world of magic caught in the painter's brush, or the writer's words, bits of vivid and vanishing detail. In space any number of painters can dance on the end of a brush, and the writer makes a soundless bow and disappears into the alphabet. ■

